

**RECOGNITION FOR ACHIEVEMENT AND CITIZENSHIP
NEW YORK MEMBER RECEIVES ELLIS ISLAND MEDAL OF HONOR
BY ROBERT TALIAFERRO, NEW YORK BUREAU CHIEF**

MARYLOU BERK, CORPORATE VICE PRESIDENT OF A LEADING MEDIA AND MARKETING COMPANY, IS AWARDED, ALONG WITH 99 OTHER HONOREES, THE ELLIS ISLAND MEDAL OF HONOR. THE HONOREES ARE ALL OUTSTANDING REPRESENTATIVES OF THEIR ETHNIC HERITAGES, FORMER RECIPIENTS INCLUDING ROSA PARKS AND ELIE WIESEL.

SGI-USA member Marylou Berk was awarded the Ellis Island Medal of Honor the evening of May 8 before an audience of more than 1,000 people. Recipients of the gold medallion exemplify achievement and citizenship. This prestigious ceremony was covered by all the major news organizations and broadcast live over the Internet.

Former recipients of the gold medallion who have been featured in the *World Tribune* include Elie Wiesel and Rosa Parks. This year's 100 honorees were chosen from more than 40,000 nominations open to the public. They included business leaders, public servants, educators, clergy, artists, soldiers, lawyers and entertainers. Most were introduced as an outstanding representative of one or more ethnic heritages. Better-known recipients included former Astronaut and Senator John Glenn, Chief Justice William Renquist (Swedish), Toys 'R' Us CEO Robert C. Nakasone (Japanese), Lila Kim (Korean), Wayne Newton (Native American/Irish/German), Marlo Thomas (Lebanese/Italian), Quincy Jones (African), and author, children's advocate and humanitarian, First Lady Hillary Clinton.

Marylou Berk (Italian), corporate vice president of Ziff-Davis, Inc., was one of the few recipients who were invited to offer their appreciation during the awards ceremony. In her remarks, Marylou spoke about her grandmother's passage through Ellis Island and of her mother's struggle to raise three children alone after her father's early death. "She taught me the value of having a mission, made me feel great about myself and taught me how to use obstacles as a source of growth. She encouraged us to be individuals while demonstrating the importance of unity. I continue that life philosophy today."

Of her career at Ziff-Davis, she said that it shows that "when you make positive causes, you get beneficial effects. Ziff-Davis encourages and rewards its employees to think 'Out of the box.' It's so refreshing. How fortunate I am." Ziff-Davis is a leading media and marketing company focused on the Internet and related technologies. One of Marylou's more recent accomplishments at Ziff-Davis was the relocation of their corporate headquarters in Manhattan. The project took two years and involved coordination with more than 500 people.

She concluded by saying: "I have learned the reason for life is to be happy. It is the basis upon which our country has been founded. It is the same reason that this country leads the world and continues to embrace immigrants. I encourage all of you to work as hard as you can at being happy in life. That is the only way that world peace can be achieved."

Marylou has been practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism for 15 years and is a vice women's division leader in Lincoln Center District. Her husband, Allen Berk, is the Ansonia Chapter men's division leader.

This 13th annual event was sponsored by the National Ethnic Coalition of Organizations, which serves as an umbrella organization for more than 300 ethnic organizations. NECO's mandate is to preserve ethnic diversity, promote ethnic and religious

equality, tolerance and harmony, and to combat injustice, hatred and bigotry. In his remarks, NECO Chairman William Fugazy spoke out eloquently and forcefully about overcoming the hatred and bigotry that have recently surfaced in this country as evidence by criminal acts.

The purpose of the awards gala is to celebrate various heritages by recognizing the outstanding accomplishments of people who make up the ethnic and cultural “mosaic” of this country. All ethnic groups are honored, whether or not their ancestors arrived through Ellis Island. By recognizing the common dreams and aspirations of all peoples who are part of this country, NECO’s purpose is to forge unity and hope through a celebration of common values.

From 1892 to 1954, Ellis Island was the doorway to a new life for more than 12 million immigrants. Forty percent of all living Americans today can trace their heritage to Ellis Island, including this author. It was not only the place, but also the spirit of Ellis Island that was the theme of First Lady Hillary Clinton’s remarks.

As the keynote speaker, she emphasized that Ellis Island was both a place that needed to be preserved and a “state of mind” that we must maintain for the “present and the future.” The First Lady had just returned from Fort Dix where she had greeted Kosovo Albanian refugees coming to America. General Day, in charge of their reception, had said that an old woman arriving with a scarf around her head had reminded him of a photo of his grandmother on Ellis Island dressed in the same way. “For them, this was their Ellis Island,” said the First Lady. By opening our hearts and our country to these refugees: “We are saying who we are. We are emphasizing the importance of individual rights and mutual respect.” She suggested that mutual respect for all ethnic groups, our Ellis Island legacy, be our guiding principle in attempting to resolve the conflict in Kosovo.

The event concluded with fireworks display and a dinner for the honorees and their guests.

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